

# 2006 MTA Commuter Survey



**Harford Commuter Assistance**  
**July 11, 2006**

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In May of 2006, Harford Commuter Assistance conducted its annual survey of Harford County's Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) bus commuters to learn more about the habits and needs of the riders. This year Harford Commuter Assistance was trying to determine if the needs of riders are being met, if employer offered incentives impact ridership, and if ridership is changing. The survey coincided with Clean Commute Month and a commuter thank you program.

### **Methodology**

The survey consisted of eleven questions and a section for comments. Nine questions were related to bus commuting. The last two were to find out if commuters were interested in carpools or vanpools, and if they were aware of the Harford Commuter Assistance program. The surveys were postage paid, or commuters could fill out an online survey. A return date of June 2, 2006 was set, and commuters who returned surveys by that date were eligible for a prize drawing.

Nearly 300 hundred surveys were distributed during the first three weeks of May. The surveys were handed out at all the county park and ride lots serviced by MTA Commuter Buses on the 411, 412, and 420 routes. Surveys were also passed out at various bus stops on the 410 route, which has no park and ride lots, and the 420 route, which has only two park and ride lots.

Harford Commuter Assistance tried to reach two or more stops on every route.

The greeters arrived at the park and ride lots or bus stops five to ten minutes before the first bus departed and stayed through the departure of the last southbound bus. This year Harford Commuter Assistance also tried to meet commuters during the evening commute at two bus stops.

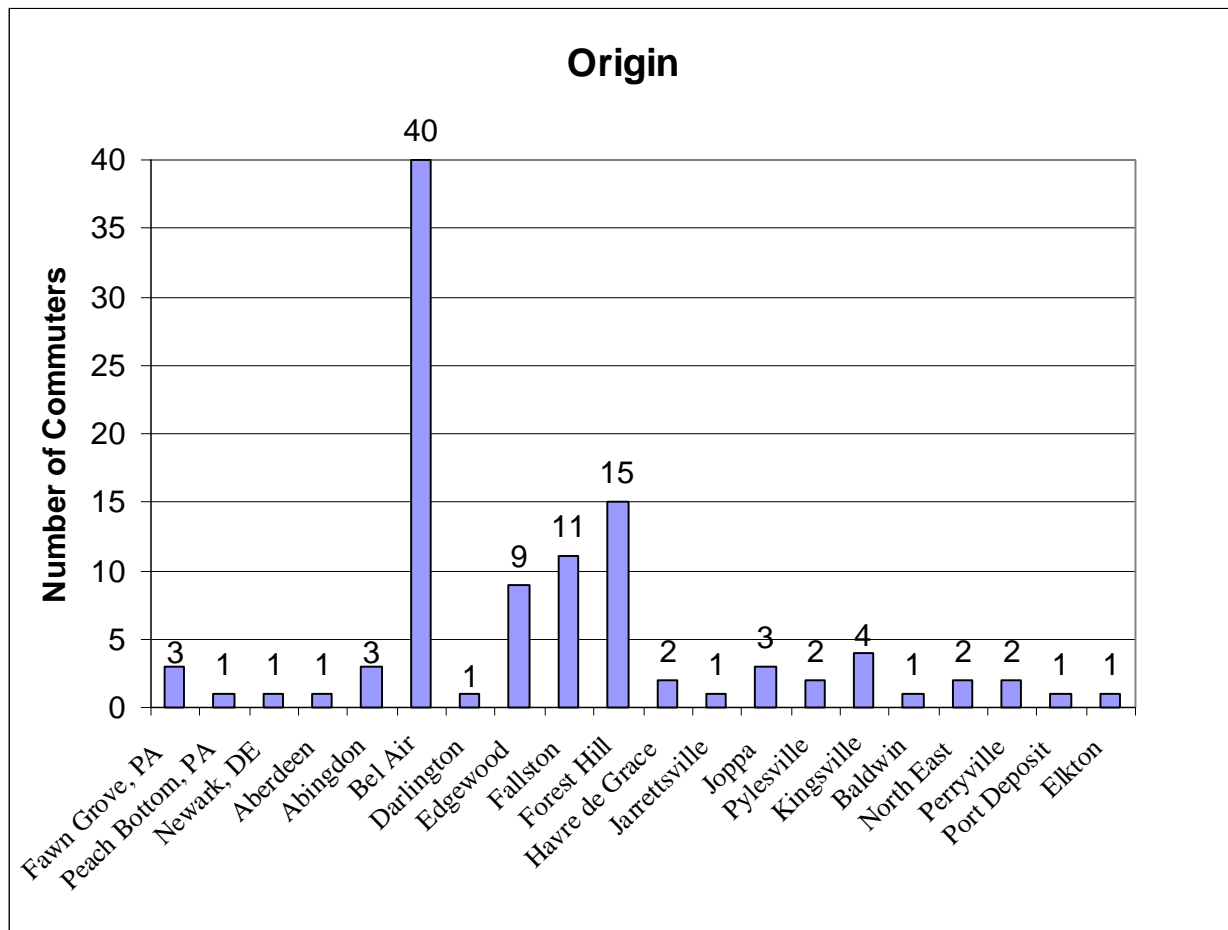
## Results

Commuters returned 104 surveys. Participants mailed 84 surveys while 20 others chose to fill out the online survey form available at the Harford Commuter Assistance website. The results are as follows.

### Origin

The 104 commuters who responded to the survey came from three counties and three states to use Harford County's Park and Ride lots with MTA Commuter Bus service (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**



The majority of commuters (85%) were from Harford County; the others came from Baltimore County (5), Cecil County (6), York County (4), and Newark, Delaware (1). Within Harford County, 40 commuters came from the Bel Air area. Forest Hill had the second highest number

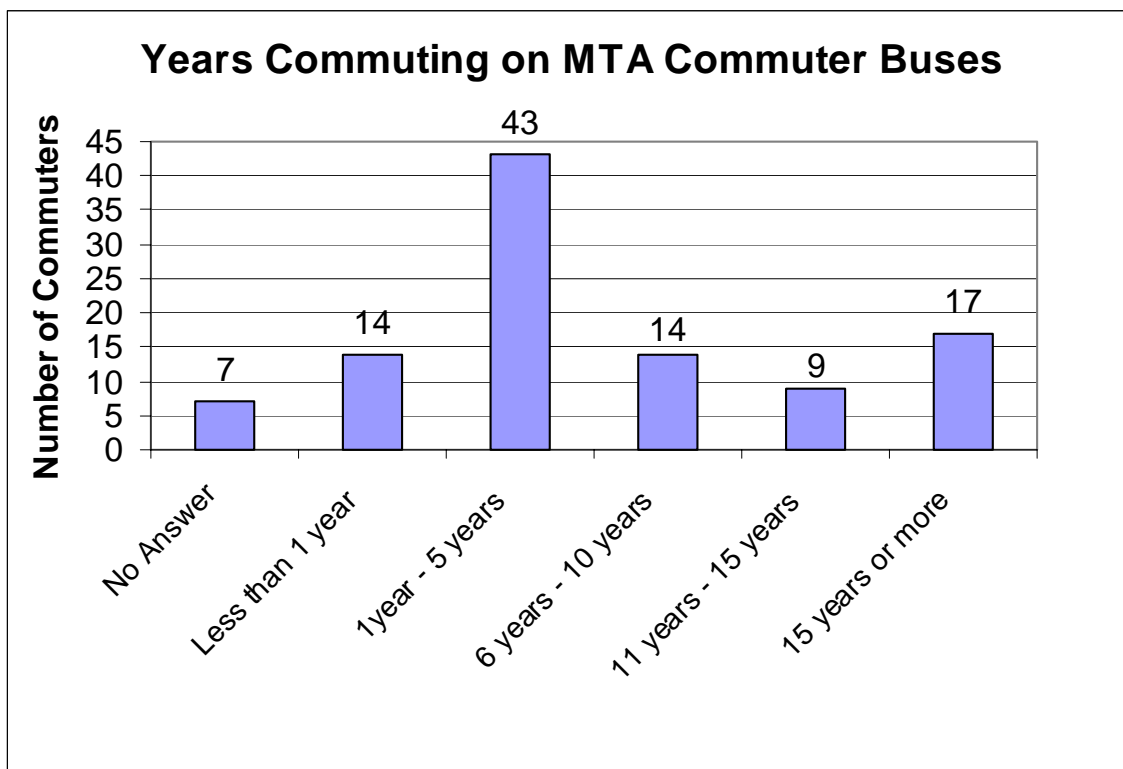
of commuters with 15. Fallston and Edgewood followed with 11 and nine commuters respectively.

## Ridership

The survey asked two questions involving ridership on the MTA Commuter Buses. The first question asked if riders had noticed a change in the number of people riding their bus. The majority of riders (96) noticed ridership had increased while one reported a decrease and seven recorded no change or declined to answer.

The second question asked riders how long they had been using MTA Commuter Buses. The largest percentage (41%) of riders had used the bus for one to five years (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**



The second largest group (17) had been riding for more than 15 years. Several riders had been using the system for more than 20 years. An equal number of riders (14) had used the buses for less than a year or six to ten years.

## **Needs of the Riders**

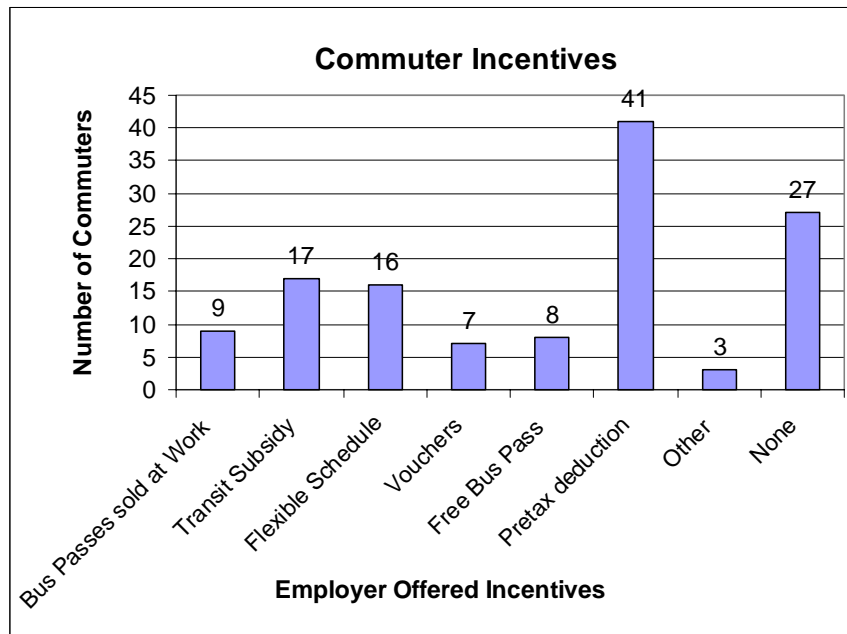
Commuters were also asked if the route and schedule served their needs. The vast majority of riders answered yes to both questions, but many of the comments offered a different opinion. In the comments section, 27 commuters asked for schedule changes including an earlier bus and later bus run in the morning, a midday bus both to and from Harford County, and a late evening bus from Baltimore for people working longer days.

Commuters on the 410 and 420 bus routes identified a need for more parking. At this time, the 410 route has no official park and ride lots. The 420 route has two, on the northern end of the route. It is not clear from the comments of riders, if they realized they are able to park at the Aberdeen Train Station to use the bus stop across Route 40, however the train station lot is already near capacity.

## **Employer Incentives**

Harford Commuter Assistance wanted to know how many riders receive incentives to subsidize the cost of monthly bus passes. Participants could check as many as applied and several checked more than one, resulting in 128 answers for 104 participants (Figure 3). Only 26% of riders reported that their employer offered no incentives. The majority of commuters (74%) received some sort of incentive from their employers to use public transit. The most common incentive (39%) was a pretax deduction. Others reported included transit subsidy, flexible schedule, and bus passes sold at their jobsite. One comment made by several commuters was that state employees did not receive any type of incentives if they lived outside of Baltimore City and took the commuter bus. State employees, with the exception of MTA employees, are eligible for city bus, metro, and light rail passes but not commuter bus or MARC train passes.

**Figure 3**

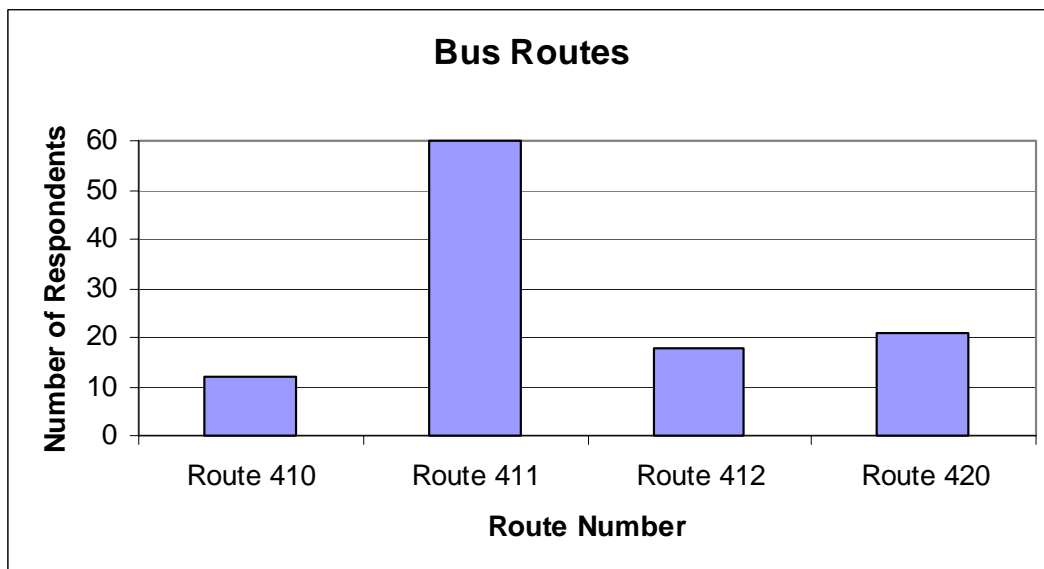


### **Bus Routes and Park and Ride Lots**

The survey also asked commuters which bus routes and park and ride lots they used. Since park and ride lots are not evenly distributed among the bus routes we were not able to survey an equal number of commuters on each route. Corner bus stops have fewer riders than the large concentrations of riders found at the park and ride lots.

The majority of riders (60), who returned the survey, used the 411 bus route (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

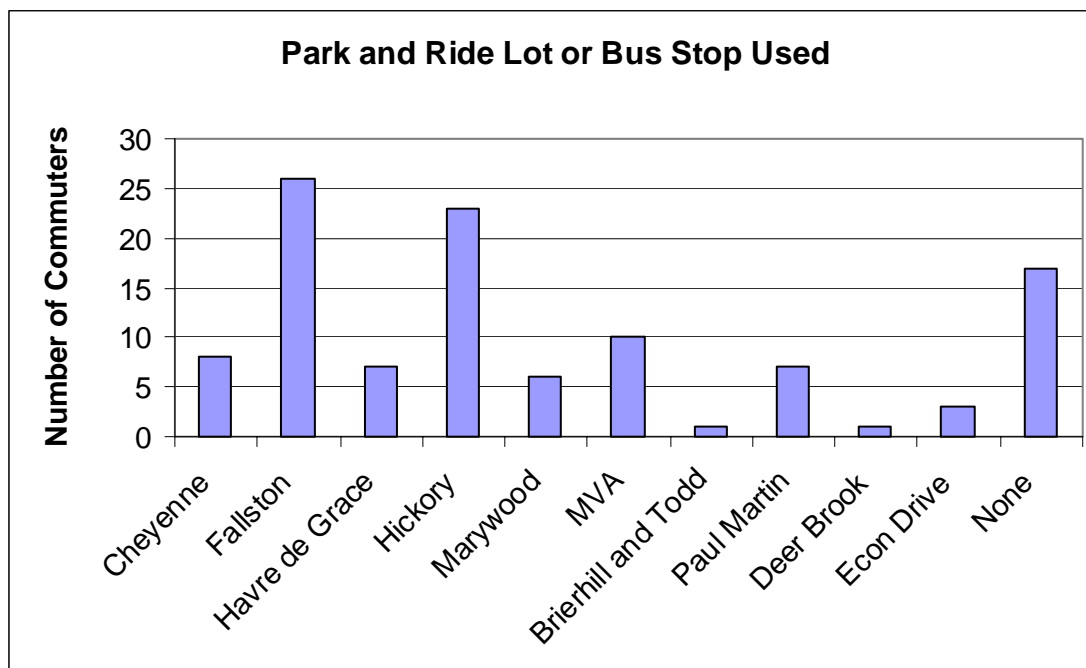




The route has only three stops all at park and ride lots and two of those, Fallston and Hickory, are very large parking lots. The 412 route has two fairly well used park and ride lots as well as several bus stops in Bel Air. It was harder to reach commuters on the 410 and 420 routes because those routes make stops at many area bus stops.

Users of the Fallston park and ride lot returned 26 surveys (Figure 5). Hickory followed with 23 users responding. These are the two largest park and ride lots serviced by MTA Commuter Buses in Harford County. The MVA park and ride lot had 10 users return the survey.

**Figure 5**



Since the 420 route only has two park and ride lots on the northern end of the route and the 410 route has no park and ride lots, most commuters from those lines filled in the bus stop they used or left the answer blank. In Figure 5, the first six sites are local park and ride lots and the second four are bus stops where commuters use limited street parking or a store lot as an unofficial park and ride location.

## **Carpool and Vanpool/Program Awareness**

Riders were also asked if they were interested in carpooling or vanpooling. Of the 104 commuters surveyed, only five said they would like to carpool. This indicates that bus riders are pleased with the service and will continue to use it even though other options are available to them.

Only 32% commuters said they were aware of the services offered by Harford Commuter Assistance. This is a slight increase over last year when 29% of commuters had heard of Harford Commuter Assistance.

## **Conclusions**

Harford County's Park and Ride lots and MTA Commuter Bus service has become a regional service that support riders from three states. However, based on survey responses, current routes and schedules do not completely serve the needs of riders. Many riders offered suggestions of changes they would like to see such as expanded schedules and more park and ride lots.

The majority of commuters receive some kind of subsidy from their employer to help with the cost of bus commuting. Several commuters expressed hopes their employers would become involved in some type of commuter assistance program. Four state employees asked why they are not eligible for commuter buses passes like their counterparts at other agencies.

The 411 route appears to be the most used from the survey returns, however from comments made by riders on other routes, ridership is increasing on all the routes. Several riders on both the 410 and 411 routes mentioned riders having to wait for the next bus because all the seats were occupied or standing on the last bus of the morning. Parking remains an issue on 410 and 420 bus routes. Commuters on these routes must use parking lots of surrounding businesses or on-street parking in adjoining neighborhoods to reach their bus stop.

## **Observations/Comments**

Many commuters requested changes in the comments sections of the report. The comments fell into five main categories; schedule, park and ride lots, safety, bus maintenance and comfort of riders, and subsidies. The following recommendations have been arranged by these five categories and a sixth category added for other recommendations.

### *Schedule*

Schedule changes came up most often in the comments section, 27 commuters replied that they would like to see extra morning runs, midday runs, and late evening runs. Harford Commuter Assistance would recommend reviewing the current schedule and ridership on the routes to see if schedule changes can and should be made to accommodate the riders.

Three riders commented that the buses do not adhere to their schedule or that the schedule is hard to keep due to traffic. Schedule times on busy roads may need to be reevaluated to make sure they are still feasible. The 420 route riders had comments about how rarely the bus makes it back to Havre de Grace on time.

Consideration should also be given to the potential impacts that the I-95 section 100 and 200 projects might have on commuter services. It is possible that ridership might increase during construction but commuting time might also increase necessitating schedule revisions. Also of concern is the fact that the Joppa Park and Ride lot may be unusable for a period of time. This could force carpoolers who use that lot to park at nearby Fallston. Residents of the county may also choose to ride the bus to avoid driving in the construction zones. Additional buses and routes may be needed during this time.

One commuter suggested creating a new route along I-95. There are several park and ride lots with plenty of parking in the I-95 corridor. A bus route connecting Havre de Grace, Aberdeen,

Riverside, and Joppa would provide easy access to commuters across the county as well as commuters from Cecil County.

### *Park and Ride Lots*

Many riders commented on the need for more park and ride lots. The 410 route has no park and ride lots and the location of park and ride lots on the 420 route are inconvenient to most users.

Harford Commuter Assistance, in coordination with MTA and SHA, needs to identify possible locations for park and ride lots along Route 40 and MD 924 and look at alternatives to provide commuter parking for transit riders.

The Cheyenne Park and Ride is not well maintained and is under used. Only ten commuters were counted at the park and ride during the morning of May 10 when the gift bags were handed out there. Several commuters commented that the lot needs major repairs, and one even suggested it be closed. Some commuters consider the Cheyenne lot dangerous because it is secluded and northbound riders have to cross MD 152 to reach the lot. The Fallston Park and Ride lot is nearby and has plenty of parking. If kept open, the lot needs be resurfaced and lighting needs to be improved.

Bus shelters are needed, especially on the 410 route which does not have park and ride lots .

Brierhill and Todd on the 410 route, Water's Edge stop on the 420 route, and either the Ashton Lane or Crisfield Drive stops on the 412 route are all suggested sites for shelters. The shelter at Paul Martin Drive on the 420 route also needs to be repaired. Several glass panels have been broken and the shelter does not adequately protect the riders. Routine maintenance of the site is needed.

### *Safety*

Riders commented on safety at several stops. Evening commuters using the Bel Air South Parkway stop on the 410 route have to cross Emmorton Road to reach their vehicles parked across the street. The location of the stop in relation to the light and the sidewalk configuration makes crossing at the signal much harder so most commuters jaywalk. Two possible solutions would be moving the bus stop closer to the light or adding a pedestrian crossing on MD 924 at the current stop location.

Riders using the Fallston Park and Ride are concerned about vehicles being broken into in the lot and would like to have security cameras or decoy cameras added to light poles. Users of the Cheyenne lot have the same concerns. Since it is small and secluded better lighting and a decoy camera might discourage thieves.

### *Bus Maintenance and Comfort of Riders*

Two riders commented on the need for better maintenance of buses. They reported smelling fumes, transmission problems, and issues with seat spacing. Another commuter recommended that the smaller, older buses be upgraded to larger buses to accommodate more riders. Other riders asked for signs reminding riders to be courteous and turn off cell phones and keep music volume low.

### *Subsidies*

Employers need to be educated on the options available to them for helping their employees with their transit costs. Only 26% of riders do not have subsidies which proves they are key to increasing ridership. The Commuter Choice of Maryland Program needs to be promoted among area employers. A unified outreach program with Baltimore City and Baltimore County Rideshare would reach more employers since Harford County riders are employed in

Baltimore. In addition, a regional marketing campaign would increase the visibility of the program and decrease the cost of advertising for the jurisdictions.

*Other Comments*

Since riders are coming from Pennsylvania and Delaware to use the MTA Commuter Bus service they would like to see more linkages between each state's transit systems. Expanding services into Cecil County would better service commuters from all areas. Talks should continue with Cecil County with consideration given to all options.

## Appendix - Raw Data

Origin	
Fawn Grove, PA	3
Peach Bottom, PA	1
Newark, DE	1
Aberdeen	1
Abingdon	3
Bel Air	40
Darlington	1
Edgewood	9
Fallston	11
Forest Hill	15
Havre de Grace	2
Jarrettsville	1
Joppa	3
Pylesville	2
Kingsville	4
Baldwin	1
North East	2
Perryville	2
Port Deposit	1
Elkton	1

Incentives	
Bus Passes sold at Work	9
Transit Subsidy	17
Flexible Schedule	16
Vouchers	7
Free Bus Pass	8
Pretax deduction	41
Other	3
None	27

Ridership	
Increased	96
Decreased	1
Other/No Answer	7

Schedule	
Yes	93
No	7
Other/No Answer	4

Bus Route	
Route 410	12
Route 411	60
Route 412	18
Route 420	21

Years Commuting	
No Answer	7
Less than 1 year	14
1year - 5 years	43
6 years - 10 years	14
11 years - 15 years	9
15 years or more	17

Park and Ride Lot or Bus Stop	
Cheyenne	8
Fallston	26
Havre de Grace	7
Hickory	23
Marywood	6
MVA	10
Brierhill and Todd	1
Paul Martin	7
Deer Brook	1
Econ Drive	3
None	17

Route Serve Needs	
Yes	101
No	2
No answer	1

Work Zip Code	
Zip Code 21010	1
Zip Code 21020	1
Zip Code 21201	45
Zip Code 21202	43
Zip Code 21203	2
Zip Code 21210	1
Zip Code 21231	3
Zip Code 21286	1
Zip Code 21287	7